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ABSTRACT

This booklet discusses the Community Cooperative Nursery School, a program of preschool education for children from a wide range of socioeconomic levels. The involvement of mothers in the classroom, in special classes, and in decision-making, is an integral part of the program. Sources of more detailed information are provided for this program, specifically, and for Model Programs Childhood Education, in general. (Author/NH)

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Model Programs

Childhood Education

Community Cooperative Nursery School

Menlo Park, California

A preschool program involving mothers as organizers, helpers, and decision-makers

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
Elliot L. Richardson, *Secretary*
Office of Education
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OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
Donald Rumsfeld, *Director*

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FOREWORD

This booklet is one of 34 in a series of promising programs on childhood education prepared for the White House Conference on Children, December 1970. The series was written under contract by the American Institutes for Research for the Office of Economic Opportunity, and the Office of Child Development and the Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Within the broad area of childhood education the series includes descriptions of programs on reading and language development, the disadvantaged, preschool education, and special education. In describing a program, each booklet provides details about the purpose; the children reached; specific materials, facilities, and staff involved; and other special features such as community services, parental involvement, and finances. Sources of further information on the programs are also provided.

Mothers of preschool-age youngsters in Menlo Park, Calif., are working together to provide preschool education for their children. The mothers are deeply involved in the school through their work as classroom assistants, their attendance at special classes, and their service as members of the school's governing body. At Community Cooperative Nursery School, the mothers play anything but a passive role; they not only participate in policy decisions but help carry them out as well. Through their work and the teachers', children from 2 to 5 enjoy 5 half-days per week in a happy, stimulating environment that helps them prepare for elementary school.

About three-fourths of the children enrolled in the school are black; many live in neighborhoods that are predominantly black. They come from a wide range of socioeconomic levels, and the school has no admission requirements. Most of the funds for the school come from the Office of Economic Opportunity. There is no tuition, but each child's mother must agree to contribute time and effort to the program. This assistance keeps costs low and allows the mother an opportunity to help her child and others as well.

HOW THE SCHOOL BEGAN

Several years ago a young black mother was looking for a nursery school in which to enroll her children. She was unable to find one that she felt met their needs, so she tried to interest other mothers in organizing a nursery school. She succeeded in getting about 40 mothers involved in the project; then she began to seek financial assistance. Mental Research Institute of Menlo Park agreed to write the grant proposal and to act as a delegating agency, and funds were obtained from the Office of Economic Opportunity in early 1969.

Finding a place for the school was more difficult. Originally housed in a Teen Center, after 4 months it moved to its present location at Trinity Episcopal Church, Menlo Park. There it uses two Sunday School rooms, an office, and a playground, in exchange for which it donates $40 a month to the church for maintenance, heating, and lighting.

At present the school has an enrollment of about 30 children. Classes are held from 8:30 to 11:30 each weekday morning. Holidays and summer vacation are the same as at a public elementary school.

A MORNING AT THE SCHOOL

Community Cooperative Nursery School has two classes of about 15 children each--one for 2- and 3-year-olds, and one for 4- and 5-year-olds. A State-certified nursery school teacher is in charge of each class, assisted by at least two mothers.

The day begins between 8:30 and 9:00 a.m. as the children arrive. Most are picked up at their homes by the school bus; some are brought by their parents. The first part of the morning is devoted to play, but the materials and activities are designed to aid the children's development. A typical morning finds one group occupied in the housekeeping area, with its child-sized play stove, refrigerator, table, and chairs. Another group is seated at a long table intently working puzzles. A third group is exuberantly creating various shapes and objects at the play-dough table. A few children are riding on toy trucks around the room or "reading" in the quiet of the book corner; one boy is busily talking into a disconnected telephone. Some, who are playing with other materials such as beads and games, may stop later on to watch goldfish swimming in a bowl.

After the play period there is a group activity. For the older children this usually includes work on "the letter of the day." The teacher shows a large, construction-paper letter; then she

explains how it sounds. Words beginning with the letter are discussed and the day's art activity is related to the letter; for example, for the letter *I* the children cut and paste paper ice cream cones; for *M*, mittens. They also trace the letters on paper. The younger children also have a group activity and art work, but their lesson is more likely to emphasize colors and shapes than letters.

A 10- or 15-minute recess comes in the middle of the morning, and except in rainy weather the children play outdoors on the playground equipment. A brief rest follows recess; then the "treat" or snack is served. Various students help by passing out cups and napkins, and the two mothers and the teacher serve the food. A "treat" is more than a snack--generally including sandwiches, fruit juice, and cookies; and each child can have as much as he wants. The eating period is used for learning, with the teacher asking such questions as: "What shape is your sandwich?" "What color is this juice?" "How many cookies are on this plate?"

A story time concludes the half-day in the nursery. Either the teacher or a mother tells the story and discusses it with the

children. The letter, shape, number, or other concept learned that day is reviewed. By 11:30 a.m. it is time to leave.

All activities are aimed at preparation for elementary school. Teachers and mothers are concerned with the healthy development of the children, not teaching specific skills such as reading. Readiness is a goal, however, and activities are also designed to develop muscle coordination and audio and visual distinctions.

EMPHASIS ON VERBALIZING AND CITING POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

Both teachers and mothers try to help the children verbalize their feelings. A child is encouraged to tell another child, "I didn't like what you did to me," rather than to hit him or react with silence or withdrawal. Similarly, adults do not spank the children but instead reason with them, expressing the situation in words rather than merely reacting in anger. "We must discipline a child in a way that doesn't tear him down," a mother explains. Mothers and teachers also emphasize the children's good behavior, singling out acts for praise rather than for criticism. One can hear them make comments like "Carol, that's very nice to help your friends," "You did a good job on that," and "Tom, you are working so well today!"

Mothers learn the techniques of reasoning and positive reinforcement as they work with the teachers. They help with the instruction and, perhaps most important, are there to assist and comfort the children. As one mother explained, "Once you get in the classroom you're not just one child's mother, you're everybody's mother." This close relationship helps the children develop trust in a number of adults and adds to the mothers' understanding of how to work effectively with children.

6 THE MOTHERS' OBLIGATIONS TO THE SCHOOL

In describing the role of mothers in the school, one said, "We want mothers who don't just want to bring their children and dump them." Involvement of mothers is an important part of the program, and before a child is accepted for enrollment, his mother must make several commitments to the school.

Each mother must spend one morning per week helping in the classroom. If she is unable to come she can pay $2 for a substitute, but this is not encouraged except in emergencies. One mother, whose employment makes it impossible for her to be at the school during the week, has made special arrangements to contribute time on Saturdays to clean the classrooms, repair materials, and do other needed tasks.

In addition to classroom assistance, each mother is required to attend Mothers Meetings that are held from 7 to 7:30 p.m. twice a month. Also attended by the teachers, the meetings include discussions of such subjects as classroom procedures, successful ways to discipline children, and the educational value of certain toys and games. In addition, individual problems are brought up and specific questions asked of the teachers. A mother explains that, with this arrangement, "We have the privilege of saying 'I don't like that' or asking 'Why are we doing that?'"

A general business meeting is held one evening each month, which all mothers are required to attend. This session generally lasts about 2 1/2 hours. Here the mothers are involved in policy decisions and curriculum planning; but an elected board of directors, consisting of seven to nine mothers, makes final policy decisions.

During the school year a class for mothers and fathers is held once a week from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. For 1970-71 the class is called "Living with Your Child" and is taught by two psychiatrists who volunteer their time. The class deals mainly with child development, helping parents learn to deal with their children more

effectively. Although mothers are not required to attend these classes, they may use hours spent there to make up for time they were unable to give in the classroom or at meetings.

If a mother fails to fulfill her obligation to assist in the classroom and attend the Mothers Meetings and general business meetings, she is sent two warning letters. After that, if she has not made arrangements to contribute her share of time, her child is dropped from the nursery school. The president of the nursery school explains that they do not like to punish a child for a situation that is not his fault; however, they feel that unless they enforce the rules the policies will not work. Fortunately, few children have had to be dropped; most mothers do their part.

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS OF TIME AND EFFORT

Mothers also contribute in other ways to the Community Cooperative Nursery School. They take turns buying and preparing the treat and help plan field trips. During the year the children make excursions to such places as a pumpkin patch, a Christmas tree farm, the zoo, police and fire stations, and nearby parks. Mothers help provide transportation and supervision for these trips; occasionally the fathers are able to help, too. Mothers also help teachers prepare materials, often working at home.

All mothers' work is coordinated by the "participation mother," a volunteer. She sets up the schedules for classroom assistance, making sure that at least two mothers will be in each classroom every day, and also schedules treat preparation.

The mothers become a closely knit group by working together. When the home of one family was recently destroyed by fire, the school president sent out an appeal for help which began, "When one of us has a problem it is shared by all friends." This attitude seems to be common to all mothers in the school.

COSTS OF THE NURSERY SCHOOL

The operating expenses for Community Cooperative Nursery School are paid from an Office of Economic Opportunity grant of $46,000 per year. Of this amount, about $26,000 is for school expenses; the remaining $20,000 is for research costs.

Aside from research expenses, the costs of the nursery school are relatively low. Since the mothers contribute time, purchase and prepare the daily treat, and assist in the classroom, the major expenses are salaries for the two teachers and the bus driver, rental of the bus, insurance, the monthly donation to the church, and materials and equipment.

MEASURING THE EFFECTS ON BOTH CHILDREN AND PARENTS

The Community Cooperative Nursery School is being evaluated by Mental Research Institute, which is measuring the impact of the school on the children and the effect of participation and involvement in the school on the mothers. Evaluators observe the children and mothers in the classroom, and teachers keep a daily anecdotal record which is available to the evaluators.

Mothers are given an attitude questionnaire to measure their feelings about child rearing. Personnel from the Institute also interview them to see whether their association with the school has encouraged them to become more involved in personal development activities and community affairs.

Teachers and mothers believe that the nursery school offers a great deal to both children and their mothers. The children receive a happy introduction to school and develop skills, maturity, and self-discipline. They learn to interact with other children and adults, and feel a special sense of identification with the school because their mothers are also involved.

Mothers also benefit. A teacher explains, "We see really good changes taking place in the mothers." They learn to apply techniques of child psychology and become more tolerant of children.

The teachers believe that many of them have begun to take more active roles in public schools and community activities as a result of their experience with the nursery school.

SCHOOL PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Plans have been drawn up for a new and larger school, and land has been made available on a long-term lease from the City of Menlo Park; however, construction must wait until more than $75,000 can be raised. The mothers and teachers at Community Cooperative Nursery School hope to be able to accept more students--ideally a total of 60--and offer afternoon sessions at least 3 days a week.

The mothers also want to maintain a racially integrated student group. Working and playing with children and adults of other races are valuable experiences, they feel, for all concerned.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information on this program may be obtained from:

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Laurel and Ravenswood
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MODEL PROGRAMS--Childhood Education

This is one in a series of 34 descriptive booklets on childhood education programs prepared for the White House Conference on Children, December 1970. Following is a list of the programs and their locations:

The Day Nursery Assn. of Cleveland, Ohio
Neighborhood House Child Care Services, Seattle, Wash.
Behavior Analysis Model of a Follow Through Program, Oraibi, Ariz.
Cross-Cultural Family Center, San Francisco, Calif.
NRO Migrant Child Development Center, Pasco, Wash.
Bilingual Early Childhood Program, San Antonio, Tex.
Santa Monica Children's Centers, Calif.
Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction, Salt Lake City, Utah
Dubnoff School for Educational Therapy, North Hollywood, Calif.
Demonstration Nursery Center for Infants and Toddlers, Greensboro, N.C.
Responsive Environment Model of a Follow Through Program, Goldsboro, N.C.
Center for Early Development and Education, Little Rock, Ark.
DOVACK, Monticello, Fla.
Perceptual Development Center Program, Natchez, Miss.
Appalachia Preschool Education Program, Charleston, W. Va.
Foster Grandparent Program, Nashville, Tenn.
Hartford Early Childhood Program, Conn.
Philadelphia Teacher Center, Pa.
Cognitively Oriented Curriculum, Ypsilanti, Mich.
Mothers' Training Program, Urbana, Ill.
The Micro-Social Preschool Learning System, Vineland, N.J.
Project PLAN, Parkersburg, W. Va.
Interdependent Learner Model of a Follow Through Program, New York, N.Y.
San Jose Police Youth Protection Unit, Calif.
Model Observation Kindergarten, Amherst, Mass.
Boston Public Schools Learning Laboratories, Mass.
Martin Luther King Family Center, Chicago, Ill.
Behavior Principles Structural Model of a Follow Through Program, Dayton, Ohio
University of Hawaii Preschool Language Curriculum, Honolulu, Hawaii
Springfield Avenue Community School, Newark, N.J.
Corrective Reading Program, Wichita, Kans.
New Schools Exchange, Santa Barbara, Calif.
Tacoma Public Schools Early Childhood Program, Wash.
Community Cooperative Nursery School, Menlo Park, Calif.